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AUTHOR MacDonald, Ginger
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ABSTRACT

For the past 20 years, discussion of issues of ethnic and cultural differences in counselor supervisory relationships in counselor training programs have been polarized between two schools of thought. One says ethnic knowledge and specific sensitivity is important, while the other says that specific social and anthropologic knowledge is essential. The paper stresses three other perspectives. First, a more systematic approach to the big picture of multicultural issues in supervision is essential. Second, effective supervision must be approached as a matter of international development of cognitive complexity. Third, it suggests that a more constructivist approach will facilitate better supervision. A table is included that summarizes the levels of cognitive complexity in operation during multicultural supervision at the supervisor, counselor, and client levels. It states that several complex issues are to be considered when a supervisor and supervisee are of different cultures. Suggestion include: (1) evaluate the developmental level of the supervisee; (2) attempt to see the broad effect of interaction of the cultures and systems on the supervisor and supervisee's life experiences; (3) learn to think with complexity; and (4) do not assume race or other cultural factors are the most salient issues in the supervisee relationship. It includes several examples of supervision cases. (Contains 21 references.) (JDM)

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Issues in Multi-cultural Counseling Supervision

Ginger MacDonald, Ph.D.
Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington, USA

For the past twenty years, discussions of issues of ethnic and cultural differences in counselor supervisory relationships have been polarized between two schools of thought, exactly replicating the cross-cultural counseling discussion (Strupp, 1973). One camp says ethnic knowledge and specific sensitivity is important, but not critical, if the core counseling conditions (e.g., empathy, congruence, respect) are met. (Patterson, 1996). For example, Cook & Helms, (1988) in their empirical study of race in supervisory relationships found perceived supervisor liking to be the strongest factor related to successful supervision, regardless of the race of the participants. The other camp says that specific social, and anthropologic knowledge and experience are essential in order to effectively work with clients different from oneself (These positions are more fully addressed by Das, 1995). Some take the middle ground saying both are important, but the tension still exists. Leong and Wagner (1994) in their summary of the literature through 1994 suggest that in cross cultural counseling (a) race differences matter, especially in the perception and expectations of the counselor on supervisor's level of empathy, congruence, and respect, (b) race influences counselors' perception of supervisors' liking, and (c) there are some circumstances in which race does not seem to have much impact.

While a blend of both positions is probably necessary (Das, 1996; McFadden, 1996), these positions stop at the point of (a) ethnically appropriate counseling skills or (b) non-biased thinking. Both sides miss the main point of supervision. The question must be: How might we move our supervisees to their next developmental level? Let us reframe the situation by suggesting three other perspectives. First, we must take a more systemic approach to the big picture of multicultural issues in supervision. Secondly, we must approach effective supervision as a matter of intentional development of cognitive complexity. Finally, I will suggest that a more constructivist approach will facilitate better supervision. In the process of this discussion, I will share examples from supervision cases in which I have been involved. Following the call from Weinrach and Thomas (1996) I will intentionally discuss cultural examples not typically mentioned in recent literature.

It is important to define terms of this discussion. The choice of the term "multi-cultural" is intentional. Following Bernard (1994), the term is philosophically and practically more accurate than cross-cultural. Cross-cultural implies a dyadic interchange of two persons, each with a singular, primary identity rooted in their race or culture. Actually, supervision is at least triadic (to include the client) and then each person may have several types of cultural identifications (e.g., race, gender, age). Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan (1993) define multicultural counseling as counseling in which two or more persons with different worldviews (ways of perceiving one's social environments) are brought together in a helping relationship. This broad definition, when applied to supervision, allows the appropriate and necessary assumption of more complexity. Culture, in the broad sense, is an important determinant of behavior, and is a factor in all aspects of counseling and supervision. There is a difference between culture as an anthropological construct and the subjective individual culture of one's life experience. Individual's identifications with a specific cultural group are mediated by temperament, family structure, historical period, and the experiences with other cultural groups (Das, 1995).

Systemic Approach

A focus on the supervisory experience demands attention to a number of different ecosystems. Taking into account the supervisor, supervisee, and clients' systems and subsystems, we encounter a interaction of dynamic, reciprocal but not proportional influences. (Das, 1995). The relative alliances within cultural systems, including racial identities are all legitimate foci of the supervision. The proportional areas of influence are not static, but often change over time, reflecting growth and development of the individuals within the system.

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As supervisory systems of importance are defined, including general and cultural differences, we must watch out for reification of terms like race and ethnicity (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1993). A broad definition of culture recognizes that within group differences are stronger than between group differences (Pedersen, 1996; Weinrach & Thomas, 1996). The supervisee's culture may include issues of ethnicity, race, religion, gender, age, or types of disabilities.

Case example 1[1]

The supervisor was a European-American male in his 30's. The supervisee was an Asian-Indian woman in her 20's. She had recently begun facing personal issues of anger relative to male authority figures, and had developed a strong novice feminist perspective—rejecting male authority of any kind. The young woman considered there to be no difference between them ethnically, but significant and impeding differences in gender. As an inexperienced supervisor, he was unable to attend to the variety of cultures influencing her response to him. He approached supervision in a fairly linear fashion, wondering, "What have I done to cause her to lose trust with me?" This supervisory relationship was rocky at best, and although they worked out many of their differences, significant trust never developed. Had the supervisor seen the larger picture with each of their systems and subsystems silently impacting their work, he might have been able to intervene more effectively.

Cognitive Complexity

A few models of counseling and supervision exist to take in the complexity of multicultural issues (Atkinson, et al., 1993; Helms, 1990), but traditional counseling theories, to the extent that they have disregarded the cultural context, are usually inadequate (Pedersen, 1996). By applying a cognitive complexity model (MacDonald, 1991) I will begin to address this inadequacy. Supervisors must attend to many levels of cognition: (a) the supervisor's thinking about the supervision (self, counselor, and client issues), (b) the counselor's thinking about the counseling, (c) the counselor's thinking about the supervision, and the (d) the client's thinking about the presenting problem, and (e) the client's thinking about the counseling. If the supervisor, counselor, or client are from different backgrounds, ethnic or racial differences may emerge as an overt or underlying variable in the supervisory relationship.

Much of the current discussion in how to deal with these differences revolves around the content of the differences, specifically racial, ethnic, and cultural differences. For counselors in training, there is much to learn. Barnard (1994) suggested that supervisors need multicultural competence before becoming a supervisor. They need to be as least as multiculturally sensitive as their supervisees (and the supervisees as their clients). Supervisors should be familiar with and use a developmental model (Atkinson et al., 1993; Helms, 1990), to determine readiness to address multicultural issues. Cultural sensitivity plus cognitive challenge will help move the supervisee toward more competence.

While Brown, Parham and Yonker, (1996) suggest that racial identity attitudes are modifiable through training, this change in attitude is often the end goal of the discussion in multicultural counseling. An implied assumption is that more respectful attitudes are enough. However, a reduction in bias does not, in and of itself, make one a good counselor of clients with diverse perspectives, nor does it make one a good supervisor. Perhaps being able to "love one's neighbor" is necessary, but it is an insufficient condition for excellent counselor supervision.

It is necessary for the supervisor to approach the task seeing multiple levels of cultural complexity, holding the levels simultaneously and then applying them in an appropriate model of supervision at the counselor's level of development. The supervisor must understand developmental processes, and apply this knowledge at the self, counselor, and client levels. Then the supervisor must form a schema for understanding supervisees needs, and translate them to an appropriate developmental level for that supervisee.

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[1] Case examples 1 and 3 are described in great detail in Nelson & MacDonald, et al.

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An example of the complexity of supervision applied to a multi-ethnic situation would be the developmental demands of supervision (Carney & Kahn, 1984) The supervisor must be aware of creating a supervisory environment that meets the supervisee at the supervisee's stage of identity development. Some trainees possess no knowledge of their own ethnicity and its impact on their work. Case 1 was an example of this point. Since the supervisee was in a beginning stage of identity development as a feminist, that was salient for her, at least temporarily overshadowing other identity issues. The supervisor could not encourage her ethnic identity development, especially in light of the other issues.

An example of a complex cognitive-supervisory task is the observation of parallel processes between the supervisor and the supervisee that mimic the dynamics between the counselor and the client (Vargas, 1898, cited in Leong & Wagner, 1994). Cultural differences would certainly be a part of this observation and dynamic. For example, if a client were feeling victimized by an employer for racial reasons, the counselor, experiencing difficulty in helping the client, may feel like the supervisor is acting prejudicially in the supervisory relationship. This is a very complex, but important observation to make in the supervisory setting.

Case example 2

The supervisor was a middle-aged, female, European-American professor in a counselor training program. The supervisee was an Iranian male, about eight years younger. The supervisee was deaf and worked with interpreters. In a sense, the supervisee was working in his fourth language (Farsi, Farsi sign, American English, American Sign Language). The supervisee was counseling a European-American, hearing woman, younger than himself. He was also in a training program in a Christian university while he was a devout Muslim. In the supervision sessions his being deaf and the process of having to counsel through interpreters was a key focus. Gender and religious values were also somewhat more salient issues than ethnicity, but separating these into component parts was not possible nor, from a systems perspective, desirable. As there were multiple levels of complexity in this supervision, the supervisor needed to spend more time processing the variables with the supervisee. In this situation, as this was in a beginning practicum, it was essential to keep all the elements of the systems in the supervisor's mind, but to allow the supervisee to focus on just a few at a time. The supervision was successful, although laborious at time.

The following table summarizes the levels of cognitive complexity in operation during multicultural supervision.

Supervisor Level:
Supervisor's perception of client's cultures in presenting problem
Counselor's perception of client's cultures in presenting problem
Client's perception of own cultures in presenting problem
Counselor-client relationship within cultures
Supervisory relationship within cultures
Counselor Level:
Counselor's perception of client's cultures in presenting problem
Client's perception of own cultures in presenting problem
Counselor-client relationship within cultures
Supervisory relationship within cultures
Client Level:
Client's perception of own cultures in presenting problem
Counselor-client relationship within cultures

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Constructivist approach

As much of counseling and supervision is involved with the construction and evaluation of identity, if racial oppression on a continual basis has been part of someone's life experience, then that experience will affect identity development. In fact, race may become the salient part of that person's identity. Helms (1990; Helms & Piper 1994), and Atkinson, Morton, and Sue (1993) have well formed minority identity development models. On the other hand, as each member of the supervisory relationship has membership in many cultures, there will be times in which one membership is more salient than another (Das, 1995; Pedersen, 1996).

Cook's (1994) discussion of racial identity in supervision is important as she applied Helms's (1994) redesigned model of racial identity development. Cook advocates for making racial identity an immediate part of the initial supervisory interactions. I agree, with the caveat of not assuming that race is the supervisee's most salient identity. For some, it may clearly be the most important issue determining the supervisory relationship. For others, there may be alternate areas of joined or conflicting cultures that are influential.

One issue that can arise when a supervisor sees ethnic identity as the overriding factor in a supervisory relationship, is an imposition of the supervisor's construct on the supervisee's understanding of the relationship. A first issue a supervisor must to consider is the salient element of the supervisee's culture that is impacting the session. Or, to be even more realistic, what combination of cultural issues are salient at this time? For example, ethnicity might be an issue of impact in the supervisory relationship. Or, the worldviews about gender within those ethnic differences may be more important. Others have recommend we expand the dialogue on diversity to include cultures of nationality, age, disability, gender, educational level, ethnicity, language, physique, race, religion, secular orientation, social class, and trauma. (Atkinson & Hackett, 1995; Das, 1995, Weinrach & Thomas, 1996.)

Supervision should be a reciprocal, constructed event. Fukayama (1994) raised an interesting situation in which the supervisee had more cultural knowledge about the client's issues, but the supervisor had more skill and knowledge of how to work out appropriate interventions. Together they can construct the supervisory reality. The relationship may be more affectively defined than by racial alliance. Cook and Helm's (1988) found that even in multiracial supervisory relationships, supervisee perceived supervisor liking and conditional liking were the most predictive factors for supervisory success. How that personal relationship forms will be, of course, culturally influenced (Das, 1995).

Case example 3

The supervisor was a middle-aged, female, European-American, doctoral student. The supervisee was Japanese-Hawaiian-American male in his 20's. He admitted that he looked up to her in the same way he might respect his mother's opinion. He was deferent to her perspective (and she was quite respectful of him in return), taking feedback about the sessions and applying what his supervisor suggested. This behavior seemed reflective to him of the respect youth hold for their elders, irrespective of gender, in his culture. The supervisor was taken aback by the deference, as it was unusual in her experience. However, they openly discussed this from their first session on and formed a solid working alliance. Using his preferred construct, in both of their estimations, the supervision was quite successful.

Developmental awareness

Each of the previous cases suggest that the supervisor must be aware of the supervisee's developmental level, in order to provide the most effective supervision. The supervisor must tailor the supervision in light of a systemic perspective of the supervisee's cultural experience and cognitive ability.

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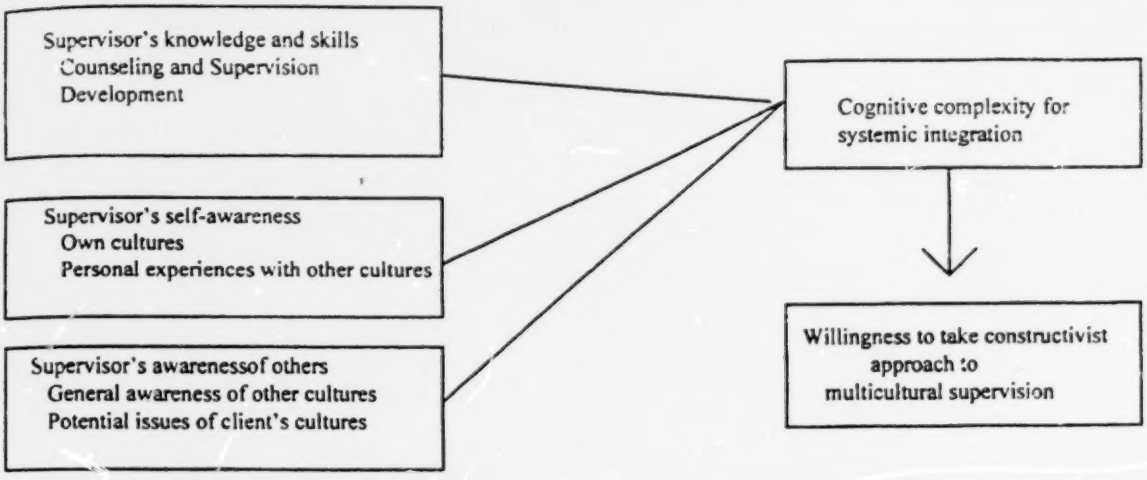
Case example 4

The supervisor was a European-American, woman in her 40's and the supervisee was a Taiwanese woman in her 30's. The supervisor felt quite ineffective as the counselor did not wish to discuss any personal feelings, saying she was not raised in her country to share herself with others. It seemed clear to the supervisor that the client had a lot of anger regarding a difficult internship situation. The supervisor, who would normally have taken an affective posture and worked with the supervisee on her anger, changed her traditional approach to supervision. She moved from her traditional consultant/counselor role to a more teacher role, keeping the discussion in sessions to counseling behaviors. Developmentally, this supervisee's cognitive abilities were still quiet dualistic. Culturally, expression of affect was difficult. Therefore a more concrete, behavioral supervision style was necessary, and as it is usually less threatening, supervision could continue. This example of how developmental issues interact with cultural norms is also evidence of the need of complex awareness of the client's inter- and intra-individual systems

Summary

The following table summarizes the characteristics of effective multicultural supervision.



In conclusion, there are several complex issues to consider when a supervisor and supervisee are of different cultures. I suggest that the supervisor must:

1) Evaluate the developmental level of the supervisee. This would include the supervisee's cognitive, affective, and racial/ethnic identity. This will allow the supervisor to gauge the appropriate feedback and intervention level.

2) Attempt to see the broad effect of interaction of the cultures and systems on the supervisor and supervisee's life experiences. This will increase empathy between supervisor and supervisee (and in parallel fashion, between supervisee/counselor and client).

3) Learn to think with complexity. Because counseling and supervision are complex processes, we must teach complex thinking skills in counselor education programs.

4) Not assume race or any other cultural factor is the most salient issue in a supervisee relationship, or that if it is at first, it might not change as the supervisory relationship develops. Through open discussion and feedback, determine key issues in the supervisory relationship.

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